

Buxbury Clipper

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America's first canal? ✓

Records show Cut River one of America's first man-made waterways

By JUSTIN GRAEBER, CLIPPER EDITOR
JUSTIN@DUXBURYCLIPPER.COM

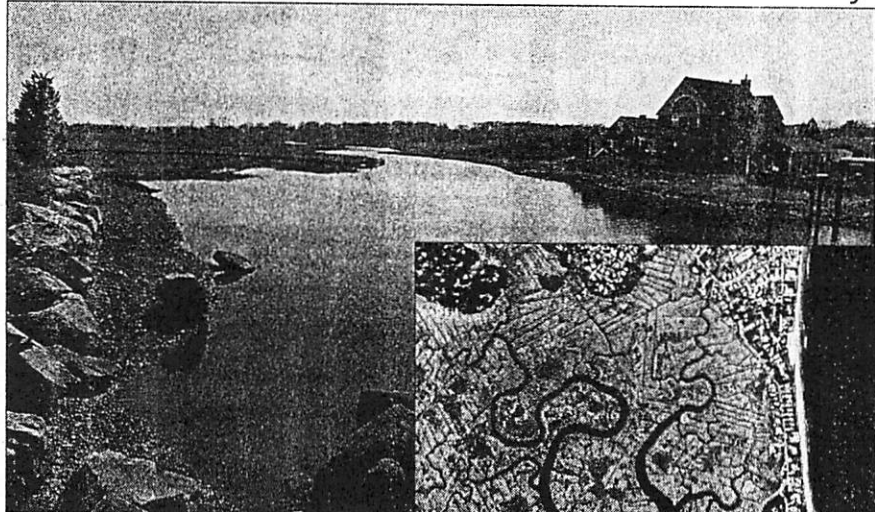
One of the country's first public works projects was commissioned in Duxbury, a waterway leading from the Back River in Duxbury to Green Harbor in Marshfield. But not only were the early settlers asked to give their money — they also had to give their time, bringing shovels and tools to widen the waterway, which may be the first man-made canal in the country.

The project is recorded in the early records of Plymouth Colony, in a book of laws from 1636 kept at the Plymouth County Registry of Deeds. The Cut River proclamation is one of several notable land records on display in the front lobby of the new Registry building on Obery Street in Plymouth.

When the building was first built, the committee overseeing the work wanted to highlight the historic nature of the registry's records.

"We wanted to use the new building as an opportunity," said Plymouth County Register of Deeds John Buckley. "We thought we could really show off the respect we have for what we do."

One of those historic re-



The Cut River Canal allowed ships to travel between Duxbury and Marshfield during Pilgrim days without going around the Gurnet. The canal has filled in over years of disuse but is still traversed by kayakers and canoes.

These meandering canals are all that's left of the Cut River Canal, part of a Pilgrim-era waterway that stretched from Plymouth to Marshfield. Regular use of the canal stopped about 1850.



ords is a court order from 1636 which describes a court order to enlarge "The Cutt at Marshfield."

"It is also ordered by the Court that the Cutt at Greenes

Harbor for a boate passage shalbe made eightene foote wide and sixe foote deepe," reads the proclamation. It says men would work ten at a time on the canal, under the direction of the colony's governor.

The impetus for the canal was to find a safer way for boats to travel up the coast from Plymouth to Marshfield and points north. Before the canal, sailors would have to go out around Gurnet Point, which could be a dangerous journey.

"It was more to benefit commerce than anything else,"

said Tony Markella, a former Duxbury resident. Markella is on a subcommittee of the registry's building committee, the Historic Display Committee.

The Cut River Canal was also featured in a Yankee Magazine article from March 1966 entitled, "America's First Canal" by Edward Rowe Snow.

Snow write that the North River, South River and Cut River were all connected through Plymouth, Kingston and Duxbury to give boats safe passage.

continued on page 8

It is also ordered by the Court that the Cutt at Greenes Harbor for a boate passage shalbe made eightene foote wide and sixe foote deepe. And for the manner how the same shalbe done for the better ordering thereof it is referred to the Gouernor and Assistant wth the help of John Winslowe Jonathan Brewster John Barnes & Christopher Waddesworth aswell to apportion every man equally to the charge thereof as also to order men that shall worke thereat, that tenn men may worke together there at once, and that the Gouernor or whom he shall appoynt shall oversee the same that it may be well performed.